CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

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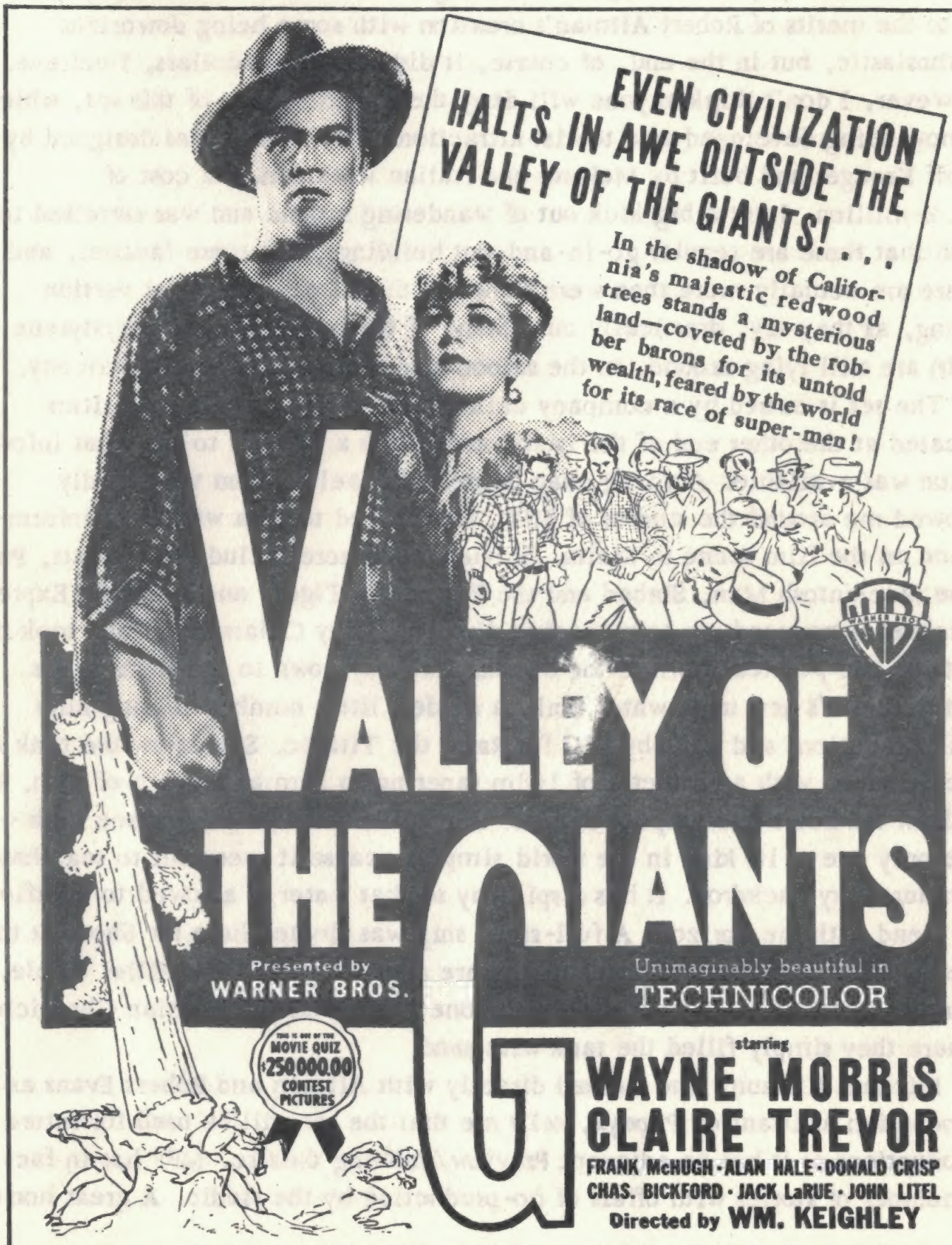
EVEN CIVILIZATION HALTS IN AWE OUTSIDE THE VALLEY OF THE GIANTS!...
In the shadow of California's majestic redwood trees stands a mysterious land—coveted by the robber barons for its untold wealth, feared by the world for its race of super-men!
VALLEY OF THE GIANTS
Presented by WARNER BROS.
Unimaginably beautiful in TECHNICOLOR
THIS IS ONE OF THE MOVIE QUIZ $250,000.00 CONTEST PICTURES
starring
WAYNE MORRIS
CLAIRE TREVOR
FRANK McHUGH · ALAN HALE · DONALD CRISP
CHAS. BICKFORD · JACK LaRUE · JOHN LITEL
Directed by WM. KEIGHLEY
Screen Play by Seton I. Miller & Michael Fessier · From the Novel by Peter B. Kyne
Music by Adolph Deutsch & Hugo Friedhofer

A WEEKLY REVIEW

C.B. STRACHAN/ OUR MAN IN EDINBURGH

The island of Malta is about four hours' flight from here and is popular with British tourists all year round. I recently took a winter break there and one of the first places I headed for was Anchor Bay in the northeast area. It's here that you'll find the Village of Swee'haven or, in other words, the set built for the Popeye film. Opinions among British critics were sharply divided as to the merits of Robert Altman's creation with some being downright enthusiastic, but in the end, of course, it did lose a few dollars, I believe. However, I don't think anyone will deny the magnificence of this set, which is now being developed as a tourist attraction. The village was designed by Wolf Kroeger and built by Maltese and Italian workmen at a cost of $1. 2-million. I got a big kick out of wandering around and was surprised to find that these are regular go-in-and-out buildings, not mere facades, and there are actually more than were shown in the film -- the final version being, as they say, drastically cut. Many of the props (such as polystyrene fish) are still lying around, in the saloon also the piano up in the balcony.

The set is owned by a company called Mediterranean Film Facilities located at the other end of the island and I took a trip out to see what information was available. A young chap named Michael Kissaun very kindly showed me around the studios of MFF, and proved to be a wealth of information on the film scene in Malta. Movies made here include Hell Boats, Pulp, The Mackintosh Man, Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger, and Midnight Express. Michael introduced me to managing director Narcy Calamatta, then took me outside and pointed down to the beach. Halfway down to the shore is the is the studio's new underwater tank, a modest little number holding nine million gallons and built by ITC for Raise the Titanic. Statistics: the tank is shell-shaped with a diameter of 108m tapering to 50m at a depth of 11m. It fills in ten hours and empties in five. Alongside this lies the surface tank -- the only one of its kind in the world simply because it faces out to sea, having a natural sky backdrop. It has a spillway so that water is allowed to overflow to blend with the horizon. A full-sized ship was floated here for Shout at the Devil and sixty-foot-high icebergs were added for Orca the Killer Whale. Parts of Clash of the Titans were also done here, plus the Martian Chronicles where they simply filled the tank with sand.

Michael Kissaun, who worked directly with Altman and Robert Evans as a production assistant on Popeye, tells me that the set will be used for future productions as it has an adjacent Preview/dubbing theatre. MFF has in fact a number of stories with offers of co-production by the studio. A great horror

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film could be made here! Ironically Popeye has not yet been shown in Malta -- wouldn't you think Paramount would have arranged a special preview? It should do well here.

Elsewhere on the island -- Cinema admission prices are low, around $1.50 Canadian, but mostly old films such as The Doberman Gang and Justice For All.

If you saw a poster headed The Greatest Love Story Ever Written -- The Greatest Movie Ever Made, would you think they were referring to Madame X? Such was the advertising in one cinema in Malta. After all that, it was no surprise to learn that this starred "Lana Turner In Her Greatest Role." Ross Hunter's epic has been running for four weeks, would you believe?

In one of the smaller villages I saw a film called Little Mo, which I suspect may have been a TV movie, starring Anne Baxter, also Anne Francis and Leslie Nielsen (memories of Forbidden Planet). The show, which only consisted of the one film, was halted half-way through for a 15-minute intermission -- God knows why, as most of the predominantly young audience seemed to be visiting the john from start to finish. This made me more than ever determined not to drink the water. This show cost 20 cents -- around 75 Canadian -- and well worth every penny.

I bought two books in a local shop -- I hadn't seen either before, but they were both on sale. The first was The Great Superman Book, published in 1978 and something of an encyclopedia of our hero. Great stuff -- my favourite character being Bizarro. The other book -- Cowboy Collectibles, itself something of a collector's item.

END OF THE TRAIL: Fred Harman, creator of Red Ryder, one of the most authentic -- and certainly the most popular -- of western comic strips, died recently in Phoenix, Arizona, at the age of 79. Raised on a ranch in Colorado, Harman worked as a cowboy before becoming an artist in Kansas City, where he, Walt Disney and Ub Iwerks were fellow employees at an animation studio. In 1934 Harman created a western comic strip called Bronc Peeler, but gave it up after four meagre years. Later in 1938 the Newspaper Enterprise Association (NEA) syndicate asked him to create another western strip and the result was Red Ryder, a name which has outlived both its creator and its existence as a comic strip. No small part of Red Ryder's fame is due to Republic's respectful treatment of the character, first in the 1940 serial, Adventures of Red Ryder, with Don (Red) Barry and then in 23 features made between 1944 and 1947 with first Wild Bill Elliott and then Allan (Rocky) Lane as Red. Bobby Blake was Little Beaver in all 23 films. Among the titles were Cheyenne Wildcat, California Gold Rush, Santa Fe Uprising, Vigilantes of Boomtown and Marshal of Cripple Creek. There was also a Red Ryder radio series in the 1940s and 50s -- at one time it had higher ratings than The Lone Ranger radio show -- and among those who played the title role was Reed Hadley.

PETE HARRIS

WAR IS HECK: Currently contaminating the late-night airwaves hereabouts are a couple of rerun series that, barring the bonfire treatment, should be locked away in the vault and have the key thrown away. Rat Patrol is the series in which four characters go tootling around the North African desert in two machine-gun-equipped Jeeps, constantly besting numerically superior German forces. Funny thing about these characters -- no matter what type of firearm they lay their hands on, Allied or German, pistol, submachine-gun or heavy automatic weapons, stationary or in a vehicle careening around the backlot, they are instant dead shots. The dumb Krauts, of course, couldn't hit the side of a pyramid, and always come out on the losing end of any encounter with the Rat Patrol. If four guys in a couple of unarmored Jeeps could do all that, it makes you wonder why the Germans bothered going into North Africa in the first place.

Black Sheep Squadron (originally called Baa Baa Black Sheep) is worse than Rat Patrol because it purports to be based on fact, with Robert Conrad playing a real-life air ace from the Second World War -- Greg (Pappy) Boyington. Apart from that, and the presence of some beautifully restored F4U Corsair aircraft, absolutely nothing about the series is authentic, even though it uses real dates and newsreel footage in an effort to recreate a semi-documentary flavor. It would take an entire book to catalogue the errors, exaggerations and misinterpretations rampant in the series, from the long haircuts on supposedly hotshot Marine fighter pilots (two of whom are played by actors built along the lines of Fatty Arbuckle) to the presence in almost every show of at least one delectable looking starlet type, usually with long flowing hair, trying in vain to portray a nurse or some other type of servicewoman.

It could be argued, I suppose, that Black Sheep Squadron is no more exaggerated than the aviation pulp stories we used to read in the 1940s. That's true -- some of those stories even outdid Black Sheep Squadron in wild heroics -- but, unlike today, the real war was always there to jar us back to reality. One look at the daily casualty lists, with the snapshots of those always smiling faces, was guaranteed to put everything back into perspective. That's the problem with tripe like Rat Patrol and Black Sheep Squadron running on TV today -- there's no counter-balancing dash of cold water in the face to remind you that it really wasn't like that at all. Despite the impression gained from all the comic book, pulp magazine, radio and movie heroics, the war was a bloody nightmare that never seemed to end. I can still read back copies of Dare-Devil Aces, watch Flying Tigers with John Wayne, listen to an old recording of Hop Harrigan and read the comic-book exploits of The Invisible Commando and Capt. Red Thortan, and still get the same enjoyment I did back then, the first time around. But they belong in a different dimension, just as they did in the 1940s. Because even then, I knew better, mainly because of those never-ending casualty lists, day in and day out.